



LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS® of Tarrant County

Gerrymandering is a practice intended to establish a political advantage for a particular party or group by manipulating district boundaries. Two principal tactics are used in gerrymandering: "cracking" (i.e. diluting the voting power of the opposing party's supporters across many districts) and "packing" (concentrating the opposing party's voting power in one district to reduce their voting power in other districts)

Redistricting reform holds potential to balance political competition. **The League of Women Voters has a long history of promoting transparent, fair, and accountable redistricting processes that reflect our fundamental value of representative democracy.** We are driven by a single goal: to make our election maps fair for everyone. We are concerned when district boundaries slice up our neighborhoods, leaving our communities without a cohesive voice of representation. In Texas, partisan gerrymandering has been a problem for decades. The political party that controls the state legislature at the time of the census can manipulate the newly-drawn election maps to favor their party's candidates, typically drawing a majority of "safe" or noncompetitive seats. The elected officials in these districts can then no longer be held **accountable through the power of our vote.** The League therefore supports reform that would place limits on partisanship and increase public participation in the redistricting process.

Stephanie Swanson, Redistricting Issue Chair, for the Texas League observes:

97% of incumbent politicians were reelected in the 2016 general election, showing that partisan gerrymandering allowed politicians to draw districts that serve themselves and not the community.

-66% of the state legislature was determined before a single vote was cast in the general election, because there was only one candidate from one of the major parties running.

-71% of state legislative offices are considered to be heavily gerrymandered with an electoral margin >45%.

This means that voters could not hold these elected officials accountable through the power of their vote.

This also produces districts that are largely democratic or largely republican, which contributes to polarization. This means that there is little compromise occurring across party lines.

The solution to this problem is to take the power of drawing election maps away from politicians and give it people who do not have a direct, vested interest. This would at least take redistricting out of the partisan battles of the Legislature and guarantee that maps will be debated in the open with public meetings.

Texas and the minority rights groups suing over the state's congressional and House districts maps are waiting to hear whether the U.S. Supreme Court will take up the state's appeal of a lower court ruling that invalidated parts of the state's political maps where lawmakers were found to have discriminated against voters of color.



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As part of a complicated, years-long legal fight over the state's political lines, a three-judge panel in San Antonio [ruled last year](#) that the state's congressional and state House maps need to be redrawn to address voting rights violations. Specifically, the judges flagged two congressional districts and nine House districts in four counties. Adjusting boundaries in those districts could lead to a wider reconfiguration of the map because neighboring districts may also be affected.

Resources to review to help with understanding the issue in Texas and to help with discussion questions:

http://www.slate.com/blogs/the_slatest/2017/04/20/federal_court_rules_texas_gerrymandered_districts_to_dilute_minority_votes.html

<https://www.texastribune.org/2018/01/03/what-expect-texas-voting-rights-court-fights-2018/>

<https://my.lwv.org/texas/redistricting>

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1CG8HwHc-h_vn8RCLdp2WU432Omz9U0i9/view - the League's position on establishing a non partisan Redistricting Commission

<http://www.redistrictinggame.org/> - online game about redistricting

Discussion Questions:

- 1) What impact do you think gerrymandering has on voters?
- 2) What impact do you think gerrymandering has on our confidence in representative democracy?
- 3) Right now, the Texas Legislature is in charge of drawing district lines. Do you think they are the best group to do that job? If not, why not?
- 4) What do you think about a Redistricting Commission? The Texas Redistricting Commission Amendment, also known as HJR 32 ([https://ballotpedia.org/Texas_Redistricting_Commission_Amendment,_HJR_32_\(2017\)](https://ballotpedia.org/Texas_Redistricting_Commission_Amendment,_HJR_32_(2017))), would have established a seven-member redistricting commission to develop and adopt redistricting plans for the districts of the Texas Senate, Texas House of Representatives and, United States House of Representatives. It was introduced in 2016 but did not make it on the ballot of constitutional amendments that we just had in November. Why do you think it wasn't?
- 5) What do you think are the most important factors to consider when drawing / redrawing district maps? The courts have said that each district needs to have a similar population size. What else should be considered? Party affiliation? Common issues? Geographic closeness?
- 6) Do you think this is an important issue for us as a League to advocate for? If yes, why?